



## Planning and Zoning after a Disaster



### Important Long-Term Considerations

Following a disaster, residents and business owners will be anxious to rebuild and in some cases relocate. This is a critical time for local government to assess issues of land use in terms of safety and long-term development concerns. Smaller communities may not have land-use plans or zoning ordinances. Training and assistance is often needed to begin using these tools after a disaster.

Larger communities usually have land-use plans and zoning ordinances, but they may need to be updated to reflect changing circumstances. Communities of all sizes may need assistance in handling the sudden surge in zoning permits and land-use proposals.

### Immediate Concerns

- While local government needs to act quickly on issues of planning and zoning after a disaster, the long-term impact of each decision must be taken into account. This is an important principle to remember and discuss at public meetings when emotions are running high.
- Land-use plans and zoning ordinances are especially useful if there has been a great deal of destruction. They can provide the community with a blueprint for the future.
- Regional planning commissions or county zoning departments often can help train local officials in setting up land-use and zoning review boards.
- If a land-use plan exists, check to see that it is up-to-date. Check building codes, subdivision ordinances and ordinances on land-use and building. Communities with an office of planning or zoning may need to hire temporary staffing to help with an increased number of requests.

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Adapted by UF/IFAS from:  
*Disaster Handbook for  
Extension Agents*  
(Wisconsin Cooperative  
Extension Service)

## Concerns during the Review Process



“Look for existing land-use conflicts and be wary of proposals that cause new land-use conflicts.”

- Look for existing land-use conflicts. Examples might include machine shops within neighborhoods, bars next to churches or schools, and dangerous chemical suppliers or high-truck traffic in a downtown.
- Be wary of proposals that cause new land-use conflicts.
- Recognize that there is a tendency to want to restore things immediately to the way they were without an eye to what makes sound, attractive community development.
- Special considerations need to be taken for properties located in flood zones. Communities may need to rezone areas, buy properties or use condemnation procedures. Sometimes rezoning a property to a "non-conforming use" can be helpful. This usually prohibits additions to property or repairs that are more than half the assessment value of homes.

## Additional Resources

- Your local emergency government office
- Your county community resource and development agent
- The American Red Cross
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)